THE WASHINGTON POST

Clip

In Kennedy Files, KGB Defector

By GEORGE LARDNER JR.
Washington Post Staff Writer

Shortly after President Kennedy's 1963 assassination, a high-ranking Russian KGB defector asserted that the shooter, Lee Harvey Oswald, would never have had the chance if standard Soviet procedures had been followed when Oswald tried to kill himself in Moscow in 1959.

The defector, Yuri Nosenko, said Oswald would have bled to death but for the intervention of his Intourist guide, who had his hotel room unlocked when Oswald failed to show up for a meeting and then failed to answer the door.

Pounding the table in a Feb. 23, 1964, conversation with FBI agents, Nosenko, who had been a deputy chief of the KGB's Tourist Division, said the guide should not have "broken into the room," but should have "instead called the KGB office like they are instructed to when they do not get any response from people with whom they have appointments."

Nosenko said he "most likely" would have told the guide to forget about Oswald for the evening and had someone check on him the next day, "at which time he would have been found dead."

The intriguing "what if" is included in 60,000 pages of FBI, CIA and other records made public last week by the National Archives and the Assassination Records Review Board, which was set up by Congress to compile all available records on the Nov. 22, 1963, assassination. The archivist in charge of the collection, Steve Tilley, said it totals more than 4 million pages, including uncountable duplicates dating back to the Warren Commission, which concluded that Oswald acted alone in the Dallas shooting of Kennedy.

Many of the files made public last week illustrate little more than the secrecy government agencies have extended to even routine records. One box from the CIA's Office of Security contains nothing but old newspaper and magazine clippings.

The report on Nosenko avoids use of his name, calling him "The SUBJECT," but contains enough biographical and other details to make his identity unmistakable. (He didn't join the Communist Party until he was 27; his father was a shipbuilder and Communist Party official.)

The seven-page summary also underscores the controversy that has surrounded Nosenko since he defected to the United States about two months after Kennedy's murder. He was regarded by some as one of the most important defectors ever recruited by the CIA and by others as a fake double agent sent here to deliver "disinformation" about Oswald, who defected to Moscow in 1959 and returned to the West in 1962.

He claimed to have been assigned to review the KGB file on Oswald after Kennedy was killed; he said it showed that Oswald had not been used by Russian intelligence.

Nosenko soon found himself the target of CIA counterintelligence chief James Jesus Angleton and other CIA officials determined to discredit

Tells of 1959 Oswald Suicide Attempt

him. He was put in solitary confinement for three years.

The CIA finally "rehabilitated" Nosenko in 1968, giving him U.S. citizenship and a $50,000-a-year consultant's post, but he remains a question mark to many, at least concerning his statements about Oswald. For instance, Nosenko's account about proper Soviet procedure when Oswald failed to keep his appointment may be accurate, but Nosenko either misremembered or made up other details about the suicide attempt.

According to Oswald's own "Historic Diary," he slashed his left wrist on Oct. 21, 1959, devastated at having been told he could not remain in the Soviet Union. His Intourist guide, Rimma Shirokova, was supposed to meet him in an hour. When Oswald failed to show up, she summoned the hotel manager and they found him bleeding and unconscious.

Nosenko said a doctor at the hospital where Oswald was taken said the next day that he would have died "had Oswald not been found for approximately 10 more minutes."

According to the FBI report, Nosenko claimed that Oswald had slashed both wrists and that the travel guide was a man. Nosenko also said it had already been decided to send Oswald to Minsk and made no mention of the fact that Oswald had been told to leave. The Russians did not decide to send him to Minsk until after he tried to kill himself.

"I think Nosenko was a bona fide defector, but he exaggerated about himself and what he knew about Oswald," said G. Robert Blakey, former chief counsel for the House Select Committee on Assassinations.